

PUBLIC INTEREST ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PIAC) MEETING
Monday, September 27, 2004, 2:00 – 3:00 PM, WHOI
MINUTES

AGENDA TOPICS

- 2004 winter flounder lesions
- 2004 *Phaeocystis* exceedances
- Public outreach

ATTENDANCE

Members Present: Patty Foley, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay (Chair); Peter Borrelli, Center for Coastal Studies; Tara Nye, Association to Preserve Cape Cod (Alternate), and Steve Tucker, Cape Cod Commission.

Observers: Cathy Coniaris, MADEP; Megan Lim, SH/SB; Mike Mickelson, MWRA; and Andrea Rex, MWRA.

MINUTES

2004 WINTER FLOUNDER LESIONS

P. Foley asked the group if they had any questions regarding Michael Moore's flounder lesion presentation to OMSAP. T. Nye asked if any of the bacterial species cultured from the flounder lesions were harmful to public health. P. Foley replied that M. Moore did not think so. P. Borrelli noted that M. Moore's presentation had non-scientific commentary woven in. It is not clear to P. Borrelli from M. Moore's presentation exactly what information should be brought to the public. He suggested that perhaps OMSAP form a subcommittee to explore other means of study, aside from M. Moore's work. A. Rex said that MWRA shares P. Borrelli's frustration. She said that researchers in other parts of the world have also had little luck in determining the cause of fish diseases. In the case of flatfish lesions in the North Sea, scientists found that it was caused by the pathogen *Aeromonas salmonicida*, but usually a fish disease cannot be linked to a single cause. It has been found that when bottom water dissolved oxygen is low, fish are more sensitive to disease, but there is no indication that this is the case here.

M. Lim asked if it is possible that an opportunistic species is infecting fish that are already weakened. A. Rex said that MWRA considered this in regards to the treatment plant, i.e. is less chlorination not killing a pathogen that is then infecting the flounder. But when we cultured the fish tissue, we only found fish-specific pathogens. P. Borrelli asked if there has been an increase in the flounder fishing effort. No one thought so. A. Rex said it is interesting that flounder have thicker skin on the bottom, yet this is where the lesions are found.

P. Foley suggested that PIAC schedule a conference call with Andy Solow to express our concerns about some of M. Moore's comments and mention our idea of forming an OMSAP subcommittee. P. Borrelli suggested that if needed, OMSAP could invite some outside experts to join the subcommittee. Additional studies should look at whether there is a public health concern. P. Foley said that Mike Shiaris also feels that the lesions are not a health concern. We should see if Jim Shine agrees and decide whether we should contact the MA Department of Public Health. S. Tucker thinks that there should be a website or a brochure notifying fishermen that the lesions are not a public health risk. The notice should also mention at this time we do not know what is causing the lesions.

PHAEOCYSTIS EXCEEDANCES

P. Foley asked the group if there are any other issues that members would like to discuss. P. Borrelli recommended that additional *Phaeocystis* investigations be pursued. He thinks that today's presentation to OMSAP was good, but that more comprehensive work needs to be done on a finer scale. M. Mickelson noted that the additional analyses mentioned on page 10 of the *Phaeocystis* information briefing will be conducted. P. Borrelli agrees that this issue sits on the line between research and monitoring. However, an exceedance occurred, and if the standard monitoring program has not found a cause, then perhaps some research is warranted. He added that perhaps a collaboration between MWRA and the Center for Coastal Studies (CCS) could provide some answers. The CCS could help out with farfield sampling and now has a plankton counter that can accurately measure *Phaeocystis*. S. Tucker said that we still have to figure out what triggers *Phaeocystis* blooms.

M. Mickelson and P. Borrelli then discussed how a collaboration could work. A team could meet to discuss the problem and develop a research plan. Perhaps we could apply for federal and/or state funds. P. Borrelli thinks that if we can come up with a unified strategy for what kind of research Massachusetts should have, then we may be able to get some funding. He thinks that this is an important time – two federal commissions and one state commission all recommend that the amount of marine research should be increased and that there should be ecosystem-based management.

A. Rex asked if the CCS is still just as concerned with *Phaeocystis* as in the past, and whether MWRA should continue to monitor *Phaeocystis*. P. Borrelli replied yes, they are still just as concerned, and unfortunately, just as puzzled. It is logical to say that if you are altering the chemistry in the ocean, then you are also altering the biology. It is appropriate to continue to monitor degraded coastal environments to look for subtle, long-term effects. He thinks that since MWRA is a major discharger, they should continue to monitor *Phaeocystis*. Even though the right whales entered Cape Cod Bay to feed during the *Phaeocystis* bloom, there are still unusual things going on. For example, the humpback whale and sand lance populations this year were very low. Perhaps this is due to the fact that sand lance are very sensitive to temperature shifts and were elsewhere this year, but the CCS remains concerned because our focus is the coastal marine environment. He feels that PIAC should make the statement that the *Phaeocystis* monitoring should be continued, if not be expanded. Members present agreed.

P. Foley asked who should be brought into the discussions about additional funding. P. Borrelli said that Susan Snow-Cotter is the EOEa contact and that presumably any state funding opportunities would be a part of the Governor's budget. The MA Ocean Management Task Force's recommendations on monitoring and research emphasized the need for expansion and increased coordination.

Internet addresses pertaining to this discussion:

MA Ocean Management Task Force: <http://www.mass.gov/czm/oceanmgtinitiative.htm>

US Commission on Ocean Policy: <http://www.oceancommission.gov>

Pew Oceans Commissions: <http://www.pewoceans.org/>

Mass Insight: <http://www.massinsight.com>

PUBLIC OUTREACH

P. Borrelli said that on May 14-16, 2005, at the Fan Pier in Boston, the Center for Coastal Studies will announce a new partnership with the Spirit of Massachusetts during "Boston Community Days". The partnership will keep the ship in Massachusetts waters from May to September to host a number of

different types of outreach events. The ship could be used as a platform to discuss the clean-up of Boston Harbor and there are opportunities here to collaborate. P. Foley thought it was a good idea to become involved with this. She also reminded the group of past discussions regarding hosting radio and live web discussions with the public. M. Lim suggested that these ideas could somehow be combined with the Spirit of Massachusetts, for example, students visiting the ship could later ask a scientist questions on-line. T. Nye suggested that we could have a live link on-board the ship. The Estuaries Live! program does this.

P. Foley asked who the audience is for the “Boston Community Days”. P. Borrelli replied that the community days focus on short trips for the public, day trips for schoolchildren, and longer trips. There will also be legislative days planned. This gets both the public and the press interested. It is a combination of education and community outreach. Newburyport also has a “Community Days” scheduled. P. Foley thinks that we could become involved with the “Boston Community Days” and perhaps do some web outreach. She, M. Lim, and B. Berman will set up a conference call with A. Solow (hopefully during the week of October 7th) and will also contact MADMF regarding the flounder lesions.

ADJOURNED

MEETING HANDOUTS:

- Agenda
- October 2003 draft OMSAP meeting summary
- November 2003 PIAC meeting summary
- May 2004 Workshop on technical options for monitoring the MWRA outfall meeting summary
- MWRA information briefings

Summary prepared by C. Coniaris.